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THE SPENT BULLET.

NEVER again let this generation, at least, hear one whimper from science against religion. In the long warfare, religion has often chosen her ground with stupidity, selected her weapons with ignorance, and wielded her forces with passionate feebleness; but she never made so pitiful a display and so futile a use of her resources, as science made over the death-bed of President Garfield. When the question is of nebulæ, of atoms, of the rock's growth and the earth's age, of the spirit's substance, of life's origin, of the infinite in space, the inconceivable in time, the unknowable in eternity,—science has it all her own way. We cannot bridge the chasm between mind and matter. No man hath seen God at any time, to prove him the Creator. From the grave no being has arisen to our eyes, and from the stars no voice comes to our ears to dispute whatever the wise men may say.

But here was solid ground for science to stand on and demonstrate her power. She had nothing to do with the remote, with the past, with abstractions. Before her eyes, under her hand, lay a human soul in sore strait—a human life hunted into the valley of the shadow of death, longing to come out again into the sunshine of the fair and open day. The whole nation, the whole world, shared in the longing. Whatever love and wealth could proffer was ready to the hand of science. Everything that gratitude could inspire, everything that ambition could desire, lay in wait to reward the man who should conduct the august sufferer back through the gates of life.

And science accepted the trust manfully. The most celebrated and the most accomplished brought to that darkened chamber their highest knowledge with ever renewed and unwearying effort. The railroad and the telegraph were put

under their control. No cost hindered any experiment or curtailed any care. The nation stood behind, not only permitting, but urging every expenditure of brains and money; to the same end, urged their own self-interest, patriotism, and humanity. Day and night they ceased not to work and watch, and the result was—failure, absolute, thorough, undisputed failure—failure so minute and complete, that only its terrible gravity kept it from being ridiculous, and not even its terrible gravity could keep it from being grotesque.

Science can spin the world back between her thumb and finger a billion years, and we go spinning with it because we cannot help ourselves. Science can locate the soul in the grayish matter of the brain, and we submit because we cannot dig deeper than that grayish matter to search for a deeper soul. But when science comes into a practical realm where we can prove or disprove her accuracy, her keenest scent for truth, her finest touch of skill is to grope till the man is dead, and then find the bullet in a wash-bowl. Nescience could do that. What availed science to Garfield? She never treated or touched the wound which the bullet made, and which she was summoned to heal. She never even found it. She made two ghastly wounds herself, and for eighty days she clawed at them. The bullet which the surgeons could not find, nature carefully encysted. The bullet-wound which they never touched, nature safely and silently healed.

Surgical science is reduced to the pitiful claim that she alone kept Garfield alive for eighty days. This is a suicidal self-relegation to the unprovable. Routed on the tangible field of fact, she flees to the cloud-land of speculation, and again throws up intrenchments. So claimed the pious and thrifty Winchester for bluff King Hal—

“The church’s prayers made him so prosperous.”

And as grim Gloster thundered back :

“The church ! Where is it ?
Had not churchmen prayed,
His thread of life had not so soon decayed” ;

so in response to this claim, which can never be demonstrated, is it equally irrefutable and perfectly fair to say :

“Had not the doctors preyed,
His thread of life had not so soon decayed.”

Nescience has precisely the same right and the same reason to speculate: take a man in perfect health, and give him into the control of surgeons, unwounded, and let them make two such wounds as Garfield suffered at his surgeons' hands, and let them bore into these wounds every day as Garfield's wounds were bored into,—sometimes with seven different catheters of different sizes at a single dressing,—and let them feed the man as Garfield was fed, and furnish him with the malarious air that Garfield breathed, and sequester him as Garfield was sequestered,—and not one man in ten thousand would survive the horror of it for eighty days!

Nor is it surgical science alone that suffers. Electricity came forward,—stimulated by the common grief, and love, and longing,—with an ingenious scheme to discover the ball by some mystical metallic affinity. The world was proudly bidden to bend its ear and hearken to the hum and buzz of the obedient bullet responding to the summons of the marvelous machine. How it did hum and buzz! We heard it from Maine to California, and did obeisance to science.

But when the weary soul had fled, and this fine and far-reaching science could fall to work like a butcher in the shambles—the bullet was not there! It never had been there. Science was so wholly blind to the bullet's location that she took an hour and a half to find it, even in the shambles. The bullet lay remote, concealed, where kindly nature wove around it the curtain of harmlessness, while a malignant and mischievous pus-pocket was personating it to the credulous surgeons and laughing science to scorn for eighty days. Life guarded her secret well. Death did but toss up a flattened leaden ball to a useless and senseless scalpel.

I touch upon these dire facts, which all men shudder to remember, not from hostility to the surgeons, but in utter repudiation of the vain-glorious boasting of science. I fully believe that the surgeons did, with patriotic as well as professional honor, their very highest best. And because it was their highest best, religion has a right to demand of science—an infant of days, and now self-proven to be a mewling and puking infant—to cease her random interference with religion, and to give herself exclusively to sharpening her own eyes and strengthening her own muscle.

Savans, how dare you, in your limitless ignorance and impotence, tamper with our hope of immortality? You are as unable

as the clown or the clod to discover the secret of physical life. With what shadow of reason shall you presume to annihilate spiritual life because its secret eludes you? The coarsest fanatic who can see God only on a tipping-table, does not display so monumental a fatuity as you, who can only touch mortality with your elbows, and would abnegate immortality because you cannot clutch it in your fists. Groping for truth at the bottom of a well, you would blot out the sun from the heavens, because you can only see the faint glimmer of the stars!

But while her foe, science—falsely so called, nescience rightly named, since true science and true religion are not only not foes, but two phases of one truth—while science is thus humiliated, religion, if never again, can afford to be frank, and admit that her pretensions, too, were a good deal shattered by that treacherous bullet. The faith-cure was applied, and it failed just as egregiously and just as conspicuously as the science-cure failed. It was appealed to, not with skeptical and sneering intent, but with sincerity and humility. The nation fell upon its knees in a common grief and a common desire. Men were not content to pray in secret with individual earnestness. They wanted to intensify their earnestness with an allied enthusiasm. They would besiege the throne of grace in battalions. They took the Almighty at His word, literally, and every day the sick man traveled toward the tomb till he sank into its darkness. Then the spokesmen of religion, instead of recognizing the facts and reconstructing theories upon them, straightway turned about and began to explain them away. They refused to admit that their prayers had not been answered, and began to argue that they were answered, only in another way. This is neither scientific nor religious. It is not frank. It is not sensible. It is not scriptural. If man ask bread, shall God give him a stone? St. James says squarely, the prayer of faith shall save the sick—not make it on the whole best that he should die. The Lord shall raise him up—not reconcile the nation to seeing him cast down. The Bible is not a straightforward and honest book if its words must be thus twisted to make them true. The nation in good faith asked for the President's life. It is idle to say that we wanted it if God saw that it was best. That goes without saying. If God saw that it was best, He would order it himself. No one supposes that God will ever do less than best. The directions are simple. The contract is easily understood.

St. James does not hedge. The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. We prayed the prayer of faith, and it did not save the sick. The Lord did not raise him up. Must it be said that it was not the prayer of faith? It was all the faith there was. Everything of religion in the land was in that long-drawn summer of pain and prayer, and the only prayer answered and the only plan matured were Guiteau's. He said he was divinely inspired to remove the President—and he did remove him—by the most cowardly of murders. He said he would harmonize the Republican party, and over that couch of suffering all parties and all factions were hushed for two silent months. A liar from the beginning, a monster of intelligence and iniquity, sprung from the dregs of an ancestral blood whose revolutionary force and religious fervor had left this horrible sediment of malignity and murder, his hand slaughtered a lofty life and reversed a national movement. Religion may well shudder to behold the man, but he is hers. He is not an infidel. He is a Christian. It is a ghastly and loathsome skeleton, but it is the skeleton of a pure ancestral Huguenot faith, perfect in all its parts. Heavenly influence, divine protection and providence, communion with God, companionship with Christ—there is not a sacred truth, a solemn trust, which Guiteau has not beslimed with the acrid poison of his tongue. Naming every name which the church holds holy, he stands before the church and the world, totally depraved, proving, by the horror with which we regard him, how little the church has ever believed in the doctrine of total depravity.

Let us be frank. The church stood ready, watching, eager to leap up and claim for prayer the credit of Garfield's recovery. She could not wait the issue. When the cloud lifted a little and let a momentary gleam of hope shine through, the church sang softly, tentatively, timidly, as needs she must, her delight in the answer to prayer. But if Garfield's recovery was answer to prayer and justification of the church's theory, then his death was the non-answer to prayer and the destruction of her theory. If the church founds her philosophy on the sand, that philosophy must crash when the sand is washed away. When James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sent his greeting to the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad, and assured them that the prayer of faith should save the sick, it may well be that he spoke the truth. I can easily believe that He by whom the worlds were made was

perfectly acquainted with all the properties and forces of matter, and could certify himself to His feeble and ignorant followers by combinations and appliances, which science has taken thousands of years to feel after and will take thousands more to command. But to say that He does it now, to say that, in response to the prayers of the church, He did it last summer for the United States of America, is a statement which intelligence cannot accept, and which ecclesiasticism cannot enforce. Science, indeed, reaped a harvest of humiliation, but theology won no laurels from this solemn summer.

When surgery had relinquished the tortured body, and theology had tried to re-adjust herself from the shock of the released soul, law came to the front to avenge violated justice and to protect menaced society. The process has not been fragrant, nor does the result betoken a brilliant triumph. I do not presume to pass judgment upon lawyers, any more than upon ministers and doctors. I can readily believe that the practicable best was done. I feel not the least sting of shame before foreign nations. I doubt not many a European prisoner has behaved as ill, and whether he has or not, I would rather an accused man should sauce high Heaven, than be hustled away in secrecy to chains and dungeons, as has been done to so many of the Old World's accused. I rejoice to remember that the only fault found with Judge Cox was that he showed himself too lenient toward the hated and hateful criminal; that an American judge, fully aware of the merited, unsurpassed, and overwhelming popular odium visited on the guilty wretch, chose himself to share it rather than abate one jot or tittle of the possible shelter which the law provides for accused and arraigned prisoners. It was justice, and justice alone—overstrained, possibly, but erring, if at all, on the humane and generous side—which allowed Guiteau liberty to make full exhibition of his deformed nature; and of that I trust Americans will never be ashamed.

Nor did anything happen in the court-room to justify the wide and wild condemnation of the trial. The indecorum was almost exclusively confined to the newspapers. Among the spectators it was of the rarest and slightest. The order of the assembly was scarcely more disturbed by the harsh, rasping, monotonous outbreaks of the shameless prisoner than is the order of society by the mendacious, malignant, egotistic, Guiteauistic babble of the London journals upon the trial.

What is to be said of the law is said, not relatively to its administration in other courts or countries, but to the administration of the law in itself considered. And thus considered, the fact remains, unquestioned and unquestionable, that a bad man—a liar, a swindler, a malignant from the beginning, cankered with conceit, inflamed with egotism—murdered a man in open day, in presence of many witnesses. The penalty of murder is the rope. Wide, one might suppose, would be the gate and broad the way and swift the march of that man to the gallows. The days passed into weeks and the weeks into months, and the air whose sacred hush received the last breath of the beloved President was foul with the obscenity and profaneness, the gibes and jeers and jokes, the rage and the boasts, the impudence and the audacity of this coward, murderer, assassin; all the dignity of the court, all the formality of law, all the reverence due to learning, to virtue, to position, to womanhood, was not able to restrain him within the bounds of decency. To one thing only he proved amenable, and that was rough Western justice—a Leadville miner's threat: one man, who had small faith in Eastern formula, stood behind his wife, and made to the cowardly Guiteau the simple statement that one word in derogation of that wife and he would shoot him on the spot. It was enough, and the assassin's threatened exposure crumbled into maudlin praise. Bench and bar and jury could not defend themselves against Guiteau's noisy and vulgar scurrility.

And what did the law accomplish? What new reverence for its methods and its triumphs did we acquire who watched its slow progress? Guiteau, with his clear, shrewd mind, knew at the outset that his danger lay from mob law rather than from statute law. He made all his arrangements to flee from popular justice, which would have torn him in pieces instantly, to legal justice, which is loitering and uncertain. And his faith was justified. The way of the law, instead of being short, sharp, and decisive, was not only loud with his rant, but tortuous and inconclusive. Mountains of testimony were heaped up around facts which were admitted to begin with. A great cloud of expert witnesses were summoned to investigate Guiteau's brain, with as child-like a faith as if an equally great cloud of experts had not been brought to shame over Garfield's body. And with all the time, and talent, and money expended, not a single important fact was discovered, not a single new relation was developed; all the

forms and solemnities of the law only came to the point that the public had reached in four and twenty hours—that the assassin was a human monster, who should be hung by the neck till he is dead.

The universal relief that was felt when the jury brought in the verdict shows how wide-spread was the apprehension that the law had darkened counsel by words without knowledge. The great satisfaction lay, not in the assurance that the law had been successful over crime, but that common-sense had been successful over law.

The only man who gathered glory from the assassination was the victim—the President, the politician, the statesman. Surgery, theology, law, may well ask of the future the mercy of its silence, but to the gallery of heroes politics may proudly add another form, of proportions as grand and symmetrical as any which the past can show or the future promise. And this politician was one who had touched and turned from the pulpit and the bar, and found in politics only his congenial and abiding home. Nor was he a figure arranged for exhibition, prepared for the occasion. The occasion found him. As much by accident as anything in this world is accident, the cross fell upon him which has since become his crown. He was a man who, before taking the highest degree, had passed through every lower grade.

The pervading popular judgment had not found him exceptionally great or exceptionally good. His own knew him, but when waves of political censure swept over the land he was not exempt. When Congressional methods were denounced, he was even singled out for hostile clamor. Personal slander—that political weapon so common and so reckless—assailed him with its utmost virulence. It did not confine itself to political antagonism—it attacked private character. Nothing that should characterize a thief, a perjurer, a bribe-taker, a liar, failed to be affirmed, publicly and persistently, of this man. Up to the very day of his election, up to the very eve of his murder, his peace was assailed by the unwearying voice of slander. On the Friday evening before the fatal Saturday that slew him, he declined an urgently sought visit because he must needs pass through Boston, and the official salutations of Boston must come to him from lips which had uttered slanders that he could neither resent nor overlook.

Thus,—in the presence of death let us be perfectly fearless and perfectly frank,—thus besmeared with all the mud that political

fury can fling, suddenly, without a moment's warning, without a single instant to hide his iniquity, to cleanse himself from sin, or to fold his robe Roman-wise about him, this man was struck down to helplessness and death. As instantly all the smirch and smear vanished into non-existence, and he lay a prostrate figure of purity, and patience, and patriotism, the shining image of domestic virtue, of manly heroism, of political nobility.

For eighty days

“—in stern silence
His thralldom he bore,
Till the last morning came,
And death opened the door”;

and never under any test did one jot or tittle of manhood fail him. Every republic on this earth, and every soul that turns wistfully toward freedom, gazed with infinite interest upon his long struggle, to know what manner of man a republic nurtures; and every republican heart thrilled with joy, in all its heaviness, to see that never king nor kaiser bore himself more royally.

Let it also be remembered, not for blame or praise to any, but in simple subservience to truth, that he held on his calm, unswerving, patient way, under the severest inflictions of the doctors and without help from the clergy. No churchly ministrations were summoned to his side. There was no mediator between God and him but the man Christ Jesus. Whatever succor came to him from above came from the direct outpouring of divine sustenance into the substance of his soul. With all manly dignity, as the old-time pagans used, with the simple, child-like trust that Christians know, he passed through the gates of death, and left to all free peoples, and to all people struggling to be free, a name that they will not willingly let die.

GAIL HAMILTON.